



GOUAIS (goo-WAY)

The name *Gouais* derives from the old French adjective 'gou', a term of derision befitting its traditional status as the grape of the peasants. This white grape variety is seldom grown today but is important as the ancestor of many traditional French and German grape varieties.

The one acre of Gouais vines grown here at Chambers are approximately 120 years old...

In 1999 researchers in the USA became interested in Chambers Rosewood's old Gouais vines and contacted Bill Chambers just as he was contemplating pulling out the 100+ year old vines. Research found that **the vines were brought into France from Croatia by the Romans around 2,000 years ago. Chambers Rosewood was known to have the only commercial crop of this grape variety in the world!** After being asked to supply a sample for DNA fingerprinting, a fascinating link between Gouais and another very old variety, Pinot Noir was established.

We were informed that somewhere in the far distant viticultural past, nobility in the form of the classic **Pinot, cross pollinated with Gouais to produce a total of 17 direct offspring** including the highly respected Chardonnay, Aligoté and Gamay noir grapes.

The vines flourish at Chambers Rosewood and traditionally the Riesling and Gouais grapes were picked together due to their proximity in the vineyard. Little did we know that we were, in fact, blending two related grape varieties!

In 2009, it was discovered that the **Riesling, was the result of a cross between Gouais and a wild strain of the Traminer grape.** This prompted our 6th generation winemaker Stephen Chambers to create 'The Family' by bringing the Riesling, Gouais and Traminer together.

Ancient History & Scientific Research

The variety had fallen into obscurity in Europe due to its reputation for producing "pretty ordinary peasant's wine" – possibly due to the vines not being in the appropriate environment.

"Gouais is known to have been widely planted in central and north-eastern France in Medieval times. At that time, it was used to produce simple, acidic, white wines, and was primarily grown in unfavourable plots less well-suited for the more highly regarded Pinot noir or Pinot gris. **Gouais Blanc was thus the grape of the peasantry rather than of the nobility."**

Scientists were able to verify the importance of crossing genetically diverse varieties to produce hardy offspring and they understood that **by preserving Pinot and Gouais Blanc they could conserve the entire gene pool of a host of classic varieties.** It's also significant that **Gouais is the 'Mother plant'** as this is where the stronger genetic material originates.

University of California, Davis Campus, investigated the lineage of France's wine grape varieties. Dr Carole Meredith, an expert in genetic manipulation and analysis of grapevines, commented ... "it is surprising enough that Chardonnay has such a lowly parent, but that all 17 of the varieties tested, which include most of the wine-grape varieties grown in North-Eastern France today, should have come from the same two parents is quite remarkable."

In December 2014 news broke of the existence of a tiny collection of ancient vines in a remote location in the Swiss Alps and Gouais Blanc was amongst them.

The abandoned vineyard was purchased & restored mainly by volunteers. These remarkably dedicated grapevine preservationists now maintain the tiny (half an acre) vineyard (only accessible by foot at an incline of 60 degrees) The site is home to several rare varieties other than Gouais, or as it is known in Switzerland, Gwäss. Grapevine Geneticist José Vouillamoz and his helpers continue to provide research information as they explore these ancient vines.

We are privileged to be custodians of the ancient Gouais Blanc vines and as the story evolves, we have since been informed that **they now think it's probable Gouais is the mother of 81 different varieties.** Records show the Gouais being here in 1883 before being wiped out by Phylloxera and then some of the first new plantings in 1901-1907.

Stephen Chambers, 6th Generation, now produces a still and sparkling Gouais. New grafting's have been planted and we await the future results.